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## Can the Messiahship of Jesus Be Read off Paul's Grammar? Nils Dahl's Criteria 50 Years Later\*

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It is half a century since Nils A. Dahl wrote his important essay 'Die Messianität Jesu bei Paulus', in which he determines that *χριστός* in Paul is effectively a proper name, not a title, on the basis of four negative philological observations: it is never a general term; it is never a predicate of the verb 'to be'; it never takes a genitive modifier; and it characteristically lacks the definite article. The purpose of this article is to reconsider what each of these observations entails about the messiahship of Jesus. My thesis is that, while all four observations are significant for understanding Paul's thought, they do not constitute proper criteria for assessing the role of the messiahship of Jesus therein.

**Keywords:** criteria, grammar, Jesus, messiahship, Nils A. Dahl

It is now half a century—57 years, more precisely—since Nils Dahl wrote his famous essay 'Die Messianität Jesu bei Paulus', arguably the single most important thing written to date on the question of messiah christology in Paul.<sup>1</sup> In that essay, Dahl raises the central question, 'Is the name [*χριστός*] still employed by Paul as a title, or is it only a proper name?'<sup>2</sup> He concludes cautiously in favor of the latter on the basis of four negative 'philological observations' about *χριστός* in Pauline usage, namely, that it is never a general term, that it is never a

\* I am very grateful to Beverly Gaventa, Martha Himmelfarb, and Ross Wagner, who generously read and commented on earlier drafts of this article. The argument is much improved for their feedback, and whatever deficiencies remain are my own responsibility.

1 N. A. Dahl, 'Die Messianität Jesu bei Paulus', *Studia Paulina in honorem Johannis de Zwaan septuagenarii* (Haarlem: Bohn, 1953) 83–95; Eng. trans. 'The Messiahship of Jesus in Paul', *The Crucified Messiah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974) 37–47; repr. in Dahl, *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (ed. D. H. Juel; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 15–25, here 15–16. My citations follow the English translation and the pagination of the most recent volume.

2 Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 15.

predicate of the verb 'to be', that it never takes a genitive modifier, and that it characteristically lacks the definite article.<sup>3</sup> Since Dahl's essay, many subsequent interpreters have taken his observations as axiomatic in the discussion;<sup>4</sup> and most have concluded that, insofar as *χριστός* in Paul is effectively not a title but a proper name, there is little or no messiahship of Jesus to speak of. The purpose of this article is to reconsider each of Dahl's four observations to decide what exactly each one entails about the messiahship of Jesus. My thesis is that, while all four observations are significant for understanding Paul's thought, they do not constitute proper criteria for assessing the role of the messiahship of Jesus therein. That question is independent of these idiosyncrasies of Pauline grammar.

### 1. Appellative

Dahl's first philological observation is that for Paul '*Christos* is never a general term but always a designation for the one Christ, Jesus'.<sup>5</sup> By 'general term', Dahl means what is traditionally called an appellative, that is, a noun that refers to a class, not to an individual only.<sup>6</sup> Dahl cites by way of contrast Acts 17.3, where Paul reasons from the scriptures with the Thessalonian Jews that τὸν χριστὸν ἔδει παθεῖν καὶ ἀναστῆναι ἐκ νεκρῶν, 'it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to be raised from the dead', and in addition that οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν, 'this Jesus whom I announce

<sup>3</sup> Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 15–16.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., M. Hengel, "'Christos' in Paul', *Between Jesus and Paul: Studies in the Earliest History of Christianity* (London: SCM, 1983) 65–77, here 67: 'Dahl's four basic philological observations speak for themselves'; also L. Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia, 1987) 6–7; N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991) 41–2; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 197–9; S. A. Cummins, 'Divine Life and Corporate Christology: God, Messiah Jesus, and the Covenant Community in Paul', *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (ed. C. A. Evans and S. F. Porter; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 200; M. Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah', *The Messiah in Early Judaism and Christianity* (ed. M. Zetterholm; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 39–40, 131 n. 37.

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 15. Likewise Hengel, "'Christos' in Paul', 67: 'In Paul Χριστός is... always simply the designation for one particular person, i.e. Jesus'.

<sup>6</sup> For a classic definition, see A. I. Silvestre de Sacy, *Principles of General Grammar* (New York: Leavitt, 1834) 24–5: 'Nouns may be divided into several classes. Some designate beings by the idea of their individual nature, that is to say, in such a manner that this designation is applicable only to a single thing, to a single individual [citing as examples "Paris," "Rome," "Alexander," and "Vespasian"]... These nouns are called proper nouns. Other nouns designate beings by the idea of a nature common to all the individuals of a species [citing as examples "man", "horse", and "cat"]... These nouns, applicable to all the individuals of a species, are called appellative nouns'.

to you is the Christ'.<sup>7</sup> Here *χριστός* is a genuine appellative, a noun referring not to an individual but to a class. Paul argues from scripture that the Christ, whoever he may be, would have to suffer and be raised; then, in addition, that Jesus of Nazareth is a member (the only member, in this case) of the class 'Christ'.<sup>8</sup> For Dahl, use of *χριστός* as an appellative is taken to be evidence of a messianic sense. If, on the other hand, *χριστός* refers only to Jesus, not to a class of which he may or may not be a member, then the word is taken to be non-connotative.

It is actually not the case, however, that all titular forms are appellatives. In other words, a noun can refer to a single individual only and nevertheless carry the force of a title. Up to and through his lifetime, 'Augustus' applied to no one but Octavian, but it is no less connotative a word for this having been the case. Likewise, 'Bar Kokhba' ('son of the star') only ever applied to Simeon ben Kosiba, but its honorific force is undisputed. So in the case of *χριστός* in Paul, its not being an appellative does not entail that it has somehow lost its conventional sense.

Moreover, there are exigencies of Paul's own context that are pertinent to his use of *χριστός*, quite apart from whether the word has a messianic sense for him. The Gospels reflect a milieu in which there is knowledge of a category 'messiah' that Jesus may or may not fit. In the Acts of the Apostles, likewise, it is an open question in the synagogue scenes whether or not Jesus the individual fits the category 'messiah'. Not so Paul's letters. Both the apostle and his churches are already convinced of the messiahship of Jesus; there are other things at issue in the letters.<sup>9</sup> If any of them previously thought of 'Christ' as a class that may or may not have particular members, they do so no longer. That the messiahship of Jesus is agreed upon, however, does not mean that it is unimportant.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, as James Dunn has rightly pointed out, 'What is characteristic and central to someone's theology need not be distinctive; what is fundamental can

<sup>7</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>8</sup> Dahl also cites Acts 26.23, part of Paul's defense of himself before Festus and Agrippa, where he claims to have preached nothing other than what Moses and the prophets had said, namely: εἰ παθητὸς ὁ χριστός, εἰ πρῶτος ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν φῶς μέλλει καταγγέλλειν τῷ τε λαῷ καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, 'the Christ would suffer, be the first of the resurrection of the dead, and proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles'. But whether *χριστός* is actually an appellative here is not entirely clear.

<sup>9</sup> This is not simply a factor of the majority-Gentile makeup of the Pauline churches. Even entirely Jewish-Christian churches could conceivably work on the basis of the same shared assumption. In other words, this fact ought not be taken, by itself, as evidence of hellenization.

<sup>10</sup> Interpreters, however, too often find Paul 'downplaying' or 'undermining' things that in fact he is simply not concerned to write about in a given context. For examples of this tendency in the literature, see A. Chester, 'Messiahs, Mediators and Pauline Christology', *Messiah and Exaltation* (WUNT 207; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007) 329–96; Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah'.

also be shared, and as shared, little referred to; what is axiomatic is often taken for granted'.<sup>11</sup>

This is not to say that Paul never knew or used *χριστός* as a proper appellative. It is possible, as Alan Segal has suggested, that before his revelation Paul had highly developed ideas about the messiah.<sup>12</sup> If so, then he will have used *χριστός* as an appellative, before and apart from his association of the term with Jesus. Whether Paul did in fact have a developed messianism before his revelation cannot, in my view, be answered with any confidence from the sources available to us.<sup>13</sup> In any case, as we have seen, even if Paul only ever used the word of Jesus, never as an appellative, this would not by any means be evidence that the word was empty of connotation for him.

## 2. Predicate of the Verb 'To Be'

Dahl's second philological observation is that '*Christos* is never used as a predicate; Paul never says "Jesus is the Christ", or the like'.<sup>14</sup> Had Paul said such a thing, it would have been evidence of messiah christology, but he did not, so such evidence is proportionately lacking. George MacRae, following Dahl, concludes, 'The important point is that he [Paul] does not discuss the issue [messiahship] in his writings, making no effort to prove or demonstrate the messianic identity of Jesus'.<sup>15</sup> It is important to note the line of reasoning followed here: Paul does not say, 'Jesus is the messiah'; therefore Paul is uninterested in the messiahship of Jesus.

11 J. D. G. Dunn, 'How Controversial Was Paul's Christology?', *The Christ and the Spirit: Collected Essays of James D. G. Dunn* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 1.212–88, here 221.

12 A. F. Segal, 'Paul's Jewish Presuppositions', *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (ed. J. D. G. Dunn; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2003) 159–72, here 169: 'Did Paul become messianic because he became a Christian or was messianism a part of his Judaism before his conversion? It seems to me quite improbable that the Pharisees before the Amoraim were devoid of messianism and that Paul found it only when he became a Christian. Paul, then, is again the earliest Pharisaic evidence of the existence of messianic beliefs among the Pharisees, even if that belief was perhaps greatly augmented and quickened by his later Christian faith'.

13 Which is not to say that nothing can be known about his pre-Christian views. But when Paul describes that period, he emphasizes his zeal for the Torah (e.g., Gal 1.13–14: 'zealous for my ancestral traditions'; Phil 3.4–6: 'blameless with respect to the righteousness of the Torah'); he never mentions anything about his views of the messiah.

14 Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 15. Likewise Hengel, "Christos" in Paul', 67: 'Nowhere is *Χριστός* a predicate. In contrast to the account of his preaching in Acts, in the letters Paul no longer has to affirm "Jesus is the Messiah"'. See more recently Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah', 37: 'Jesus is never explicitly called "the Messiah," that is, Paul never uses "Christ" as a predication of Jesus in formulations, such as "Jesus is the Christ"'.  
 15 G. MacRae, S.J., 'Messiah and Gospel', *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* (ed. J. Neusner et al.; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1987) 169–85, here 172.

There are several points to be made on this matter. First of all, it is actually not the case that *χριστός* is never a predicate in Paul. It is of course frequently a predicate in the traditional grammatical sense when it occurs in the accusative case as a direct object.<sup>16</sup> But Dahl means 'predicate' in the sense used in formal logic and linguistic semantics, that is, as a property that can be true of something; or, in grammatical terms, as a predicate of the verb 'to be'.<sup>17</sup> It is this particular usage of *χριστός* that is found to be absent from Paul.

Even this usage is not entirely absent, however. In the difficult account of the wilderness wandering in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says that the ancestors all drank from the same spiritual rock, and that ἡ πέτρα δὲ ἦν ὁ Χριστός, 'the rock was Christ' (1 Cor 10.4).<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in his interpretation of the promise to Abraham in Galatians 3, Paul quotes the phrase καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, 'and to your seed', drawing attention to the singular form σπέρματι, 'seed', which, he explains, ἐστὶν Χριστός, 'is Christ' (Gal 3.16).<sup>19</sup> In fact, then, contrary to the received wisdom, Paul actually does predicate messiahship. He does so, however, not of Jesus, but rather of these ciphers from the ancient stories of the patriarchs and the exodus.<sup>20</sup>

By no means does it follow that Paul does not think Jesus is the messiah, just that Paul has other aims than the ones his interpreters set for him. The exception presented by 1 Cor 10.4 and Gal 3.16 to the often-cited rule that *χριστός* in Paul is never a predicate shows that what interpreters have in mind are clauses of the precise form: subject Ἰησοῦς, verb εἰμι, predicate *χριστός*. That is, there is an assumption widely held among interpreters that the sentence 'Jesus is the Christ' is precisely the form of sentence that would count as evidence of a messiah christology.

16 E.g., at Rom 13.14; 1 Cor 1.23; 10.9; 15.15; 2 Cor 4.5; 5.16; Gal 3.27; Phil 1.15, 17; 3.8, 20.

17 On predicate logic, see J. Allwood *et al.*, *Logic in Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1977) 58–95.

18 Dahl grants 1 Cor 10.4 as one of a few 'places...where the careful reader would detect messianic connotations' ('Messiahship of Jesus', 17). On this verse, see further E. E. Ellis, 'Χριστός in 1 Corinthians 10.4, 9', *From Jesus to John: Essays on Jesus and the New Testament Christology in Honour of Marinus de Jonge* (ed. M. C. de Boer; JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 168–73.

19 On which see R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University, 1989) 85: 'This exegesis is less perverse than it might appear, depending as it surely does on the linkage of the catchword seed to God's promise to David in 2 Sam. 7:12–14... This [latter] passage treats the singular noun seed not as a collective term, but as a reference to a specific royal successor to David; thus, it bears evidence potential for messianic interpretation'.

20 Hays may be right that Paul's scriptural hermeneutic is more often ecclesiocentric than christocentric (see Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 86 *et passim*), but as Hays himself has subsequently shown, in not a few passages Paul gives expressly christocentric interpretations of certain scriptural oracles (see Hays, 'Christ Prays the Psalms: Israel's Psalter as Matrix of Early Christology', *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005] 101–18; also D. H. Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]).

Sentences of that form are indeed a commonplace in early Christian literature of a variety of genres.<sup>21</sup> Central to the story line of the Synoptic Gospels is a controversy over Jesus' identity, in response to which Peter's confession, σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός, 'You are the Christ', is commended by the evangelists (Mark 8.29; Matt 16.16; Luke 9.20).<sup>22</sup> John's Gospel differs drastically from the others in some respects, but it shares with them the axiom that Jesus is the Christ. The purpose of the Gospel, according to the epilogue at the end of ch. 20, is ἵνα πιστεύητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ χριστός ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 'that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God' (John 20.31).<sup>23</sup> Related to this theme in the Gospel is the controversy in the First Epistle of John over the claim Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός, 'Jesus is the Christ': the person who believes it is a child of God (1 John 5.1), but the person who denies it is a liar and an anti-christ (1 John 2.22).<sup>24</sup> The same statement appears repeatedly in the Acts of the Apostles as the content of the missionary message.<sup>25</sup> So, for example, in Acts 9 the newly baptized Saul confounds the Damascene Jews by showing them that οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός, 'This man [Jesus] is the Christ' (Acts 9.22).<sup>26</sup> More examples could be cited, but the point is clear enough: predication of messiahship of Jesus is one well-attested form of early Christian reflection on messiahship.

21 The evidence is capably surveyed by MacRae, 'Messiah and Gospel'.

22 Cf. the refrain τίς ἐστὶν οὗτος, 'Who is this?' (Mark 4.41; Matt 21.10; Luke 5.21; 7.49; 9.9); also Jesus' prophecy about the latter-day deceivers who will say εἰμι ὁ χριστός, 'I am the Christ' (Matt 24.5; cf. Mark 13.21; Matt 24.23: ἰδοὺ ὧδε ὁ χριστός); and the trial narratives, in which Peter's confession reappears word-for-word as a question on the lips of the high priest: σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός, 'Are you the Christ?' (Mark 14.61; Matt 26.63; on which see N. A. Dahl, 'The Crucified Messiah', *Jesus the Christ*, 27–47).

23 Cf. the Samaritan woman's question: οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός; 'Is this man the Christ?' (John 4.9). Likewise, some among the crowds say, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός, 'This man is the Christ' (John 7.41). The criterion for expulsion from the synagogue is the confession: ἐάν τις αὐτὸν ὁμολογήσῃ χριστόν, ἀποσυνάγωγος γένηται, 'If anyone should confess him as Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue' (John 9.22). It is an important Johannine corollary, too, that John the Baptizer is not the Christ (John 1.20; 3.28; cf. 1.25).

24 Cf. the parallel phrases Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, 'Jesus is the son of God' (1 John 4.15; 5.5); Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐν σαρκὶ ἐληλυθότα, 'Jesus Christ having come in flesh' (1 John 4.2); Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐρχόμενον ἐν σαρκί, 'Jesus Christ coming in flesh' (2 John 7). This theme in 1 John is perhaps more related to the messiahship of Jesus than it is to putative proto-Gnosticism in the Johannine community (so rightly W. Horbury, *Messianism among Jews and Christians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2003] 332, *pace* R. E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* [New York: Paulist, 1979]).

25 Albeit always in contexts of discussion with Jews.

26 Again in Acts 17, Saul, now called Paul, declares to the 'synagogue of the Jews' at Thessalonica, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ χριστός Ἰησοῦς ὃν ἐγὼ καταγγέλλω ὑμῖν, 'This Jesus whom I announce to you is the Christ' (Acts 17.3). Later still, Paul in Corinth, and Apollos in Ephesus, reason with the Jews from the scriptures εἶναι τὸν χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, 'that Jesus is the Christ' (Acts 18.5, 28).



In the Pauline letters, however, the nearest analogy is the predication κύριος Ἰησοῦς, 'Jesus is lord'. In fact, as a number of interpreters have pointed out, if there was a characteristic confession in the Pauline churches, it was probably this and not χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς, 'Jesus is the Christ'.<sup>27</sup> Paul uses the former phrase several times in expressly confessional contexts.<sup>28</sup> For example, he writes, ἐὰν ὁμολογήσῃς ἐν τῷ στόματί σου κύριον Ἰησοῦν...σωθήσῃ, 'If you confess with your mouth Jesus as lord ... you will be saved' (Rom 10.9).<sup>29</sup> This and other similar references suggest that the confession κύριος Ἰησοῦς was indeed a hallmark of the Pauline churches, even if there is no evidence that Paul was advocating this confession, κύριος Ἰησοῦς, over against the other, χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς.<sup>30</sup>

What reason is there, though, for thinking that statements of the form 'Jesus is the Christ' are the only, or even the best, evidence of a concern for messiahship on the part of an ancient author? In other words, why should that particular syntactical construction, rather than any other, be regarded as the criterion *par excellence* for messiah christology? As far as I have been able to tell, this assumption goes almost entirely unexamined in the secondary literature.<sup>31</sup> It may be that it derives from a deep-seated and unconscious inheritance from the centuries-long *adversus Iudaeos* tradition, in which the dominant question was: Is Jesus the messiah or not?<sup>32</sup> Pauline interpreters, and historians of early Judaism and

27 See Hengel, "Christos" in Paul', 67: 'κύριος Ἰησοῦς and not Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός was Paul's basic confession'.

28 A point emphasized by H. Conzelmann ('Was glaubte die frühe Christenheit?' *SThU* 25 [1955] 61–74 at 64) and W. Kramer (*Christ, Lord, Son of God* [London: SCM, 1966] 65–84), who draws the form-critical conclusion that the acclamation κύριος Ἰησοῦς was the characteristic 'homologia' of the Pauline churches, made possible by their origin on Gentile rather than Jewish 'soil'.

29 Also 1 Cor 12.3: οὐδεὶς ἐν πνεύματι θεοῦ λαλῶν λέγει· Ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς, καὶ οὐδεὶς δύναται εἰπεῖν· Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, εἰ μὴ ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ, 'No one speaking in the spirit of God says, "Jesus be anathema," and no one can say "Jesus is lord" except in the holy spirit'; and Phil 2.11, where God exalts the risen Jesus so that πάντα γλῶσσαι ἐξομολογήσονται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς, 'every tongue might confess that Jesus Christ is lord, to the glory of God the father'.

30 As Zetterholm, 'Paul and the Missing Messiah', 51, suggests: 'To present Jesus as the Messiah of Israel ... would have contributed to the continuation of the ethnic confusion that Paul is trying to correct'.

31 The exception is the work of some early twentieth-century Jewish historians who criticize their Christian counterparts for their interest in only those Jewish messiah texts and traditions that closely mirror well-known Christian ones (see, e.g., J. Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* [New York: Macmillan, 1955] 3, in response to J. Drummond, *The Jewish Messiah* [London: Longmans & Green, 1877]).

32 For an early and paradigmatic example, see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*. In the modern period, cf. the famous comment of G. Scholem, 'Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism', *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, and Other Essays on Jewish*

Christianity generally, have an intuition that that really is the issue, that any early Christian author who talked about messiahship would have had to talk about it in just this way.

This is only an intuition, however, not a warranted belief. In fact, both Jewish and Christian texts that comment on messiah figures do so in a vast variety of ways, only one of which is predication of messiahship of particular persons. Statements of the form '[name] is the Christ' account for just a small part of ancient literature about messiah figures. That Paul never writes, 'Jesus is the Christ', does not mean that he is not interested in messiahship. It only means that his interests are different from those represented in the texts that do make such statements.

### 3. Genitive Modifiers

Dahl's third philological observation is that 'a genitive is never added; Paul does not say "the Christ of God"'.<sup>33</sup> The second clause of this statement is really to the point. Dahl is not looking for just any genitive modifier; he is looking for the biblical expression *χριστὸς κυρίου*, 'the Lord's Christ', or *χριστὸς θεοῦ*, 'the Christ of God'.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, if one looks in Paul for this particular form, the results are admittedly meager. This observation should not be over-interpreted, however.

For one thing, there is actually considerable diversity in the use of *χριστός* in the Greek Jewish scriptures themselves. The idiom *χριστὸς κυρίου*, or *χριστός* with an equivalent genitive personal pronoun, is frequent in 1–2 Samuel (OG 1–2 Kingdoms) and the Psalter, and also occurs at a few places in the prophets and Chronicles.<sup>35</sup> But *χριστός* is also common and always adjectival in Leviticus;<sup>36</sup> and it occurs twice in the absolute in Daniel.<sup>37</sup> In other words, it is

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*Spirituality* (New York: Schocken, 1977) 1: 'Any discussion of the problems relating to Messianism is a delicate matter, for it is here that the essential conflict between Judaism and Christianity has developed and continues to exist'.

33 Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 15.

34 Cf. Hengel, "'Christos" in Paul', 67, citing Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus': 'In contrast to pre-Christian Old Testament and Jewish tradition it is never governed by a genitive (θεοῦ, κυρίου, etc.) or a possessive pronoun'.

35 See *χριστὸς κυρίου* (1 Sam 16.6; 24.7 [bis], 11; 26.9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam 1.14, 16; 2.5 LXX; 19.22; Lam 4.20; 2 Chron 22.7 LXX), *χριστὸς θεοῦ* (2 Sam 23.1), *χριστὸς αὐτοῦ* (1 Sam 2.10; 12.3, 5; Amos 4.13 LXX; Ps 2.2; 20.7 [19.7 LXX]; 28.8 [27.8 LXX]; 89.52 [88.52 LXX]), *χριστὸς μου* (1 Sam 2.35; Ps 132.17 [131.17 LXX]; Isa 45.1), *χριστὸς σου* (Pss 84.10 [83.10 LXX]; 89.38, 52 [88.39, 52 LXX]; 132.10 [131.10 LXX]; 2 Chron 6.42; Hab 3.13).

36 See ὁ ἱερεὺς ὁ χριστός, 'anointed priest' (Lev 4.5, 16; 6.15; cf. 2 Macc 1.10); τὸ ἔλαιον τὸ χριστὸν, 'anointing oil' (Lev 21.10, 12).

37 See *χριστός*, 'anointed one' (Dan 9.25, 26).

not the case that the biblical 'Christ' is always 'the Christ of God', grammatically speaking. In light of this diversity of biblical usage, it is not surprising that many early Jewish texts that are widely and rightly taken to refer to messiah figures do not use the formula משיח יהוה or χριστὸς κυρίου.<sup>38</sup> There is, then, no reason for thinking that Paul's failure to use this formula renders his use of χριστός non-messianic.

The formulaic 'Christ of God', while it is not a fixed feature of Jewish messiah texts generally, does happen to be characteristic of Luke-Acts, and this may explain why interpreters expect to find it in Paul's letters and judge Paul to be non-messianic for not using it.<sup>39</sup> It is well established that Luke's use of χριστός is closely modeled on the 'Lord's anointed' of 1-2 Samuel and the Psalter.<sup>40</sup> For example, in a uniquely Lukan scene in the infancy narrative, Simeon the prophet is told that he will not see death before he sees τὸν χριστὸν κυρίου, 'the Lord's Christ' (Luke 2.26).<sup>41</sup> In the Acts of the Apostles, when Peter and John are released from their arrest, the believers pray the words of Ps 2.1-2: the rulers gather together κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ, 'against the Lord and against his Christ' (Acts 4.26).<sup>42</sup> There is no question that this usage is evidence of a messiah christology, but it is only one of the possible kinds of such evidence. In fact, 'Christ of God' language turns out to be something of a Lukan idiosyncrasy, albeit one with an estimable biblical pedigree; it is not a fixed feature of ancient Jewish messiah language generally. That Paul for the most part does not use it only means that his usage is non-Lukan in this respect, not that it is non-messianic.

Second, the absence of genitive qualifiers for χριστός in Paul should not be overstated. The fact that he does not use the phrase χριστὸς κυρίου is to be expected, since for Paul the title κύριος applies, for the most part, not to God

38 The formula משיח יהוה is nowhere to be found at Qumran, to cite one significant example.

39 Per scholarly convention, I use 'Luke' to refer to the author of Luke-Acts, without thereby making any claim about the identity of that author.

40 See M. L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995).

41 Similarly, in Luke Peter confesses Jesus to be τὸν χριστὸν τοῦ θεοῦ, 'the Christ of God' (Luke 9.20); cf. the parallels at Mark 8.29 and Matt 16.16, which lack the 'Christ of God' formula. Also, in Luke the rulers mock Jesus on the cross saying, 'Let him save himself, if he is ὁ χριστὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ὁ ἐκλεκτός, the Christ of God, the chosen one' (Luke 23.35); cf. the parallels at Mark 15.32 and Matt 27.40, which again lack the 'Christ of God' formula.

42 The text of the citation in Acts 4.25-26 is identical to the text of Ps 2.1-2 LXX (A. Rahlfs, *Psalmi cum Odis* [Septuaginta 10; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979]): ἵνα τί ἐφρύαξαν ἔθνη/ καὶ λαοὶ ἐμελέτησαν κενά/ παρέστησαν οἱ βασιλεῖς τῆς γῆς/ καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες συνήχθησαν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ/ κατὰ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ κατὰ τοῦ χριστοῦ αὐτοῦ. Cf. also Peter's first speech in Jerusalem, which uses χριστός with the genitive personal pronoun for God: τὸν χριστὸν αὐτοῦ, 'his Christ' (Acts 3.18).

but to Jesus.<sup>43</sup> As for *χριστὸς θεοῦ*, while its general absence from Pauline usage is noteworthy, there is an interesting exception at 1 Cor 3.23—*χριστὸς δὲ θεοῦ*, 'Christ is God's'—albeit a predicate, not attributive, relation. Here, against certain Corinthian believers whom he censures for boasting in human beings (3.21), Paul counters, 'All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's' (3.22–23). In this passage we find not only the elusive *χριστὸς θεοῦ* in Paul, but also the parallel phrase *ὑμεῖς χριστοῦ*, evidence that the notion of 'the people of the messiah' is not entirely absent from Paul.<sup>44</sup> Also relevant here is the appositional phrase at 1 Cor 1.24: *Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν*, 'Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God', where again Christ is 'of God', but this time with intervening abstract nouns of apposition.<sup>45</sup>

It is true that, these exceptions aside, Paul does not relate Christ and God with this particular genitive formula, but it is necessary to note the other syntactical ways in which he does relate them.<sup>46</sup> Especially, Paul uses the converse genitive construction *ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, 'the God and father of our lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 15.6; 2 Cor 1.3; cf. Eph 1.3; 1 Pet 1.3), where God and Christ are in genitive-construct relation, but the other way round from the pattern of 1–2 Samuel and the Psalter. It is not *χριστὸς θεοῦ* but *θεὸς*

43 See W. Foerster, 'κύριος', *TDNT* 3.1088–94; D. B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (WUNT 2/47; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992). In more than a few cases, the referent of the title in context is stubbornly ambiguous, which may be intentional on Paul's part.

44 A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Seabury, 1968); and N. T. Wright, 'The Messiah and the People of God: A Study in Pauline Theology with Particular Reference to the Argument of the Epistle to the Romans' (Ph.D. diss., University of Oxford, 1980), especially, make a great deal of this latter notion; but clear, substantial evidence for it is slim.

45 Understandably, discussion of this passage has tended to focus on the appositives *δύναμιν* and *σοφίαν* rather than on the genitive *θεοῦ*, especially as they pertain to questions of 'wisdom christology'. Among the secondary literature, see the early treatment of W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (London: SPCK, 1948) 147–76, under the heading 'the old and the new Torah: Christ the wisdom of God'.

46 Genitive constructions aside, also relevant are those places in which God and Christ appear as a pair, especially in the grace wish *χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ*, 'grace and peace to you from God our father and the lord Jesus Christ' (Rom 1.7; 1 Cor 1.3; 2 Cor 1.2; Gal 1.3; Phil 1.2; Phlm 3; cf. Eph 1.2; 2 Thess 1.2). A similar pairing of Christ and God is evident at 1 Cor 8.6, where Paul confesses *εἰς θεὸς ὁ πατὴρ...καὶ εἰς κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός*, 'one God the father...and one lord Jesus Christ'; likewise Gal 1.1, where Paul's apostleship comes through *Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν*, 'Jesus Christ and God the father who raised him from the dead'; and also 1 Thess 1.1, the address to *τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων ἐν θεῷ πατρὶ καὶ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ*, 'the church of the Thessalonians that is in God the father and the lord Jesus Christ'. In all these cases, Christ is Christ in near relation to God, even if he is not 'the Christ of God'. Also relevant is 'son of God' language in Paul, which is too complicated an issue to be adequately treated here (but see Wright, *Climax*, 43–4; *idem*, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005] 48).

χριστοῦ, not ‘the Christ of God’ but ‘the God of Christ’.<sup>47</sup> So also, in the difficult passage about the covering of Corinthian female heads, Paul writes, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός, ‘God is the head of Christ’ (1 Cor 11.3), the grammatical converse of ‘Christ the power of God and wisdom of God’ in 1 Cor 1.24.<sup>48</sup> Otherwise, Paul actually uses θεός with a genitive modifier very rarely. When he does so, it is customarily in a benediction formula (e.g., ‘the God of peace be with you’) where the genitive is an abstract noun for a virtue that characterizes God.<sup>49</sup>

In sum, the fact that χριστός in Paul does not take the formulaic genitive modifiers κυρίου and θεοῦ counts neither for nor against its bearing its conventional sense. Use of the idiom χριστός κυρίου, of which Luke–Acts is a standout example, is evidence of a particular sort of messianism, namely one that borrows heavily from the royal ideology of Samuel–Kings and the edited Greek Psalter. But as twentieth-century research into Jewish messiah texts has made abundantly clear, there is more than one way to use biblical messiah language.<sup>50</sup> To rule against Paul’s χριστός having a definite sense because it is not followed by κυρίου or θεοῦ is to confuse Pauline usage with its Lukan counterpart.

#### 4. The Definite Article

Dahl’s fourth philological observation is that ‘the form *Iēsous ho Christos* is not to be found in the earliest text of the epistles’.<sup>51</sup> That is, the anarthrous name ‘Jesus’ followed by articular title ‘the Christ’ is not a Pauline expression. When Paul uses the two words together, both are always anarthrous, suggesting for Dahl that both are meant as names. Along the same lines, James Dunn comments, ‘Of some 269 occurrences of “Christ” only 46 (17%) speak of “the Christ”’. Dunn

47 It is worth noting that, unlike some of his early twenty-first-century interpreters, ‘nowhere does Paul (in Romans or in any other letter) identify God as the “God of Israel”’ (B. R. Gaventa, ‘On the Calling-Into-Being of Israel: Romans 9:6–29’, *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9–11* [ed. Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner with the assistance of Frank Schleritt; WUNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, forthcoming (2010)] 255–269). This is not to say that the phrase is not apt, just that it is not Paul’s way of naming God (but cf. Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ, ‘the Israel of God’, at Gal 6.16).

48 On κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός in 1 Cor 11.3, see D. B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University, 1995) 232, who rightly notes that, a mountain of secondary literature notwithstanding, the force of the argument rests not on the precise sense of κεφαλὴ but rather on the analogies Christ:man :: man:woman :: God:Christ.

49 So especially ὁ θεός τῆς εἰρήνης, ‘the God of peace’ (Rom 15.33; 16.20; Phil 4.9; 1 Thess 5.23); also ὁ θεός τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως, ‘the God of endurance and of encouragement’ (Rom 15.5); ὁ θεός τῆς ἐλπίδος, ‘the God of hope’ (Rom 15.13); and ὁ θεός τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης, ‘the God of love and peace’ (2 Cor 13.11).

50 See Neusner et al., *Judaisms and Their Messiahs*; J. H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

51 Dahl, ‘Messiahship of Jesus’, 16; citing the Textus Receptus of 1 Cor 3.11 as the sole later instance of the form, on which see below.

concludes that 'the title...has been elided into a proper name, usually with hardly an echo of the titular significance'.<sup>52</sup> The absence of the definite article implies the absence of titular significance for the word.

On the other hand, those interpreters who argue in favor of a titular sense of *χριστός* in Paul often appeal to the instances where the apostle does use the definite article. Some such interpreters grant that the anarthrous forms have no titular force but insist that the relatively fewer articular forms do have such force. So Hans Conzelmann: 'Jesus trägt weiter den Messiasitel. "Christus" hat da titularen Sinn, wo der bestimmte Artikel steht'.<sup>53</sup> Other interpreters extrapolate from the articular forms to argue that the anarthrous forms, too, retain their titular force.<sup>54</sup>

The appeal to the definite article in this matter is actually a commonplace in research into ancient texts about messiah figures generally.<sup>55</sup> As for ancient Greek, it is true that, as a rule, it does not employ the definite article with personal names. Smyth summarizes, 'Names of persons and places are individual and therefore omit the article unless previously mentioned or specially marked as well known'.<sup>56</sup> While Greek names are generally anarthrous, though, not all anarthrous nouns are names. In particular, it is well known that some appellatives, especially titles, are characteristically anarthrous, too. Smyth comments,

52 Dunn, 'How Controversial?' 214–15. My count differs slightly from Dunn's: Of the 269 instances of *χριστός* in the undisputed Pauline letters, I count 220 (or 82%) that lack the definite article, and 49 (or 18%) that have it.

53 Conzelmann, 'Was glaubte die frühe Christenheit?' 65.

54 So Wright, *Climax*, esp. 43. But more recently he has cautioned, 'The use of the definite article, in relation to *Christos*, though important, doesn't get us very far, because Greek uses the article in subtly different ways to English. We must beware of easy but false assumptions at this point' (Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 43).

55 For example, J. H. Charlesworth comments, 'We are usually uncertain that a noun is a title, since the original languages of the documents—notably Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, and Greek—did not clarify when a term should be capitalized in English and in our conceptions, and no morphological or grammatical clue helps us to separate non-titular from titular usages. Some of the pseudepigrapha are preserved solely or primarily in Syriac, which has no clear means to denote the definite article' ('The Concept of the Messiah in the Pseudepigrapha', *ANRW* 2.19.1:188–218, here 196). In modern English usage, capitalization and the definite article are widely recognized signals that a noun is being used as a title. Capitalization, though, was not for the most part a feature of any of the ancient languages in question, and the definite article in this period is notoriously difficult to handle across languages. Greek has a completely inflected article, Hebrew an uninflected one. Aramaic lacks the definite article but has an emphatic or determined state that exercises the same function. Latin and Syriac lack the article altogether, but exigencies of translation sometimes resulted in the appropriation of other features of those languages to compensate (on the Greek definite article in Syriac translation, see T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2001] §228).

56 Smyth §1136. If it be objected that *χριστός* is exceptional because cultic, it is also the case that 'names of deities omit the article, except when emphatic ... or when definite cults are referred to' (Smyth §1137).

‘Several appellatives, treated like proper names, may omit the article’.<sup>57</sup> The same pattern holds in early Christian Greek, as well.<sup>58</sup> Paul’s own practice corresponds to this general flexibility in the language. He customarily uses anarthrous forms of personal names (as, for example, in all the greetings in Romans 16), but not always so;<sup>59</sup> and he frequently uses the title *χριστός* without the article in a manner analogous to a personal name. In all this he is well within standard convention for the use of the definite article.

Dahl emphasizes that the exact form *Ἰησοῦς ὁ χριστός*, ‘Jesus the Christ’ (that is, anarthrous *Ἰησοῦς* with articular *χριστός*), does not occur anywhere in the earliest text of the Pauline letters.<sup>60</sup> Not much should be made of this fact, however. In fact, that form does not occur anywhere at all in the Greek NT, according to the text of NA27.<sup>61</sup> Presumably, Dahl has in mind several similar forms that do occur, like *Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν*, ‘Jesus our lord’ (1 Cor 9.1; 2 Pet 1.2), and *Ἰησοῦν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ*, ‘Jesus the son of God’ (Heb 4.14).<sup>62</sup> Of these similar forms, though, only one is Pauline, and that only in a single instance (*Ἰησοῦν τὸν κύριον ἡμῶν* in 1 Cor 9.1). Paul does not characteristically write *Ἰησοῦς ὁ κύριος*, and yet the signification of *κύριος* in Paul is not in question. And rightly so, because interpreters recognize that use of the form ‘[anarthrous name] [articular appellative]’ is not otherwise a proper criterion for knowing whether the second term signifies something or not.

57 Smyth §1140; citing as examples *‘βασιλεὺς king of Persia’* and *‘πρυτάνεις the Prytans’*.

58 BDF §260: ‘In the case of personal names, the final development of the language has been that in [modern Greek] they take the article as such. In classical, on the contrary, as also in the NT, they do not as such take the article’. In the case of *χριστός*, BDF read the articular instances as titles and the anarthrous instances as names: ‘*Χριστός* is properly an appellative = the Messiah, which comes to expression in the Gospels and Acts in the frequent appearance of the article; the Epistles usually (but not always) omit the article’ (§260), following B. Weiss, ‘Der Gebrauch des Artikels bei den Eigennamen’, *TSK* 86 (1913) 349–89.

59 Excluding instances falling in LXX citations and borderline cases like Satan, Caesar, Israel, and Pharaoh, there are twenty or so instances in which Paul uses articular forms of personal names (namely Adam, Moses, Hosea, Jesus, Cephas, and Stephanas). See Rom 4.9, 13; 8.11; 9.15, 25; 1 Cor 1.16; 9.9; 10.2; 15.22; 2 Cor 4.10, 11; Gal 2.14; 3.8, 14, 29; 6.17; 1 Thess 4.14.

60 Noting, however, the exception at 1 Cor 3.11 (*θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς [ὁ] Χριστός*, ‘For no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus [the] Christ’), where NA27, with all the early papyrus and majuscule witnesses, reads *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός*, but the majority text has an intervening article (Dahl, ‘Messiahship of Jesus’, 16). This is significant, if only as evidence that a tradent of the text of 1 Corinthians thought that Paul wrote, or ought to have written, an intervening article.

61 But cf. *Ἰησοῦς ὁ λεγόμενος χριστός* (Matt 1.16; 27.17, 22).

62 Other similar forms include *Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζαρηνός*, ‘Jesus the Nazarene’ (Mark 10.47; Luke 24.19); *Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος*, ‘Jesus the Nazarene’ (Matt 26.71; Luke 18.37; John 18.5, 7; Acts 2.22; 6.14; 22.8; 26.9); *Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, ‘Jesus the Nazarene, the king of the Jews’ (John 19.19); *Ἰησοῦς ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν Ἰουδαίων*, ‘Jesus the king of the Jews’ (Matt 27.37).



In many instances, furthermore, the presence or absence of the definite article with *χριστός* in Paul is simply *pro forma* and contributes nothing to the question whether the word signifies, as both Dahl and Werner Kramer have shown.<sup>63</sup> Especially, the use of the genitive forms *χριστοῦ* and *τοῦ χριστοῦ* depends on whether the governing noun has the article or not; the genitive will match its governing noun in this respect.<sup>64</sup> Nominative, dative, and accusative forms of *χριστός* usually lack the article in Pauline usage.<sup>65</sup> Some of the articular instances are simply anaphoric, referring to a preceding instance of the same word. When the presence or absence of the article is determined by formal factors like these, it cannot reasonably be taken as evidence for any particular theory as to whether or what the word signifies.<sup>66</sup>

In short, the presence or absence of the article is not determinative of the class of noun being used.<sup>67</sup> Both names and appellatives may take the article or not. Especially, there is a significant group of appellatives that follow the same rules for articles that names do. Grundmann rightly comments, 'Since proper names are used with the article, *χριστός* with the article can have the same sense as *χριστός* without it .... Use of the article does not help us to decide when *χριστός* is a title and when it is a name'.<sup>68</sup> The apparent parallel with the English definite article is only apparent and does not hold up under scrutiny.

63 Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 16; Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 206–12.

64 Per the so-called Canon of Apollonius (see Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 16; Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 207). For an excellent example, see both forms in 1 Cor 6.15: οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι τὰ σώματα ὑμῶν μέλη Χριστοῦ ἐστί; ἄρα οὖν τὰ μέλη τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποιήσω πόρνης μέλη; 'Do you not know that your bodies are parts of Christ? Will I therefore take the parts of Christ and make them parts of a prostitute?' There is a single exception to this rule at Phil 2.30: διὰ τὸ ἔργον Χριστοῦ μέχρι θανάτου ἡγγισεν, 'He [Epaphroditus] was near death for the sake of the work of Christ'; the majority text has the articular τοῦ Χριστοῦ, which is almost certainly a correction.

65 In the nominative, anarthrous *χριστός* 40 times, but articular ὁ *χριστός* 7 times (Rom 9.5; 15.3, 7; 1 Cor 1.13; 10.4; 11.3; 12.12). In the dative, anarthrous *χριστῷ* 59 times, but articular τῷ *χριστῷ* 4 times (Rom 14.18; 1 Cor 15.22; 2 Cor 2.14; 11.2). In the accusative, anarthrous *χριστόν* 24 times, but articular τὸν *χριστόν* 6 times (1 Cor 10.9; 15.15; 2 Cor 11.3; Phil 1.15, 17; 3.7).

66 The seven instances of nominative *χριστός* with the definite article but unaccompanied by Ἰησοῦς (namely, Rom 9.5; 15.3, 7; 1 Cor 1.13; 10.4; 11.3; 12.12) have tended to be at the center of the discussion of messiahship in Paul. If interpreters grant any titular uses of *χριστός* at all, they are usually among these seven texts.

67 As Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God*, 212, concedes: 'As time went on Christ came to be regarded increasingly as a proper name, yet in spite of this the article was still used with it here and there. This was possible because the pattern had already been formed, but equally because it was quite possible to use the article with the proper name'.

68 W. Grundmann, 'χριστός', *TDNT* 9.540; also Hengel, 'Christos' in Paul', 69: 'There is no demonstrable connection in principle between the use of the article and a rudimentary significance as a title'.



The many anarthrous instances of *χριστός* in Paul are not evidence that for him the word is merely a name, and neither are the articular instances evidence that it is a title.

## 5. Conclusion

Dahl himself is cautious in the conclusions he draws from these four philological observations: 'If one understands "Christ" only to be a surname of Jesus, all the statements of the epistles make good sense. This does not exclude the possibility that the name "Christ" bears a fullness of meaning. However, the messiahship of Jesus is not stressed'.<sup>69</sup> Dahl's bibliographical successors have tended to be rather less subtle. For example, George MacRae, citing Dahl's study, writes, 'For him [Paul] the Christian message does not hinge, at least primarily, on the claim that Jesus was or is the Messiah'.<sup>70</sup> More radically still, Lloyd Gaston cites Dahl as having 'convincingly demonstrated that *Christos* is for Paul a proper name and is not to be translated "Messiah"', from which Gaston concludes, 'Jesus is then for Paul not the Messiah. He is neither the climax of the history of Israel nor the fulfillment of the covenant'.<sup>71</sup> If for Dahl these four observations could be called soft criteria for assessing the messiahship of Jesus, for many subsequent interpreters they have become hard criteria.

This development is not a salutary one, however. As we have seen, none of these observations excludes the possibility of the messiahship of Jesus in Paul's thought, as some have taken them to do. They are not adequate criteria for assessing that question. The facts that *χριστός* is not an appellative, that it is not a predicate of a copulative sentence of which *Ἰησοῦς* is the subject, that it is not modified by the genitive *κυρίου* or *θεοῦ*, and that it is often anarthrous are no evidence that it does not connote messiahship. Interestingly, some of the proposed philological criteria for identifying messiahship in Paul turn out to be just characteristically Lukan phrases, not criteria derived from any other larger set of messiah texts.<sup>72</sup>

This raises the crucial question of the relation between semantics and syntax. Dahl makes the point that in no instance of *χριστός* in Paul is it necessary to take

69 Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 16.

70 MacRae, 'Messiah and Gospel', 172, adding that Dahl is not radical enough in his conclusions (172, 185 n. 3).

71 Gaston, *Paul and the Torah*, 7. The majority of Pauline interpreters have demurred from Gaston's conclusion, although most actually grant his major premise, that *χριστός* in Paul is not the title 'messiah' but simply a name 'Christ'.

72 Here I am reminded of R. Morgan's imaginary conversation between Paul and Rudolf Bultmann, in which Paul complains that Bultmann has insisted that he sound just like John (see R. Morgan, 'Introduction: The Nature of New Testament Theology', *The Nature of New Testament Theology* [ed. R. Morgan; London: SCM, 1973] 49). Paulinists have likewise insisted that Paul sound like Luke in order to be counted as a messianic thinker.

the word as meaning 'messiah'. This is true enough. That it is not necessary, however, does not mean that it is not possible or probable.<sup>73</sup> Dahl's point raises the further question why Paul bothered using that word at all. Or, to paraphrase John Collins, if his 270 uses of the Greek word for 'messiah' are not evidence that Paul means 'messiah', then what would we accept as evidence?<sup>74</sup> Semantics (the meanings of words) are never independent of syntax (the arrangement of words in sentences), but at the same time, syntax does not render semantics empty. In all but the most exceptional cases, syntax molds and specifies semantics, it does not undo them. In the end we are left with the question why Paul used this particular word so predominantly.

That question can only finally be answered by means of attentive reading.<sup>75</sup> This is the case because linguistic communication actually takes place not at the level of letters and words but at the level of sentences and paragraphs. James Barr's reminder about theological language applies equally well to language generally: 'The linguistic bearer of the theological statement is usually the sentence and the still larger literary complex and not the word or the morphological and syntactical mechanisms'.<sup>76</sup> The question of meaning, then, 'has to be settled at the sentence level, that is, by the things the writers say, and not by the words they say them with'.<sup>77</sup> This procedural rule, however, is too little followed in the secondary literature on *χριστός* in Paul. More than a few studies proceed by raising the question, citing Dahl on a few philological points, and concluding that *χριστός* in Paul is a proper name with no signification. Such an approach is clearly unsatisfactory.

Which particular strategies of contextual interpretation stand to shed the most light on the problem is a question for another article, but an example will serve to illustrate the point. Because the word in question is a Septuagintal coinage, and because Paul's letters are so dense with citations of and allusions to the Septuagint, some of the most directly relevant contextual clues are likely to be particular scriptural passages that Paul cites in close proximity to given instances of the word *χριστός*. I have argued elsewhere, for example, that the quotation of Isa 11.10 LXX in Rom 15.12 functions precisely to clarify the sense of *χριστός* in Rom 15.8.<sup>78</sup> Or again, as Richard Hays has shown, Paul's strategy of citing certain psalms of David as words spoken by Christ serves to summon up particular

73 And, after all, it is probability, not necessity, that is the proper purview of the historian.

74 J. J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 2.

75 So rightly Dahl, 'Messiahship of Jesus', 17: 'Only contextual exegesis can decide to what degree the notion of the messiahship is found in a particular passage'.

76 J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1961) 269.

77 Barr, *Semantics*, 270.

78 M. V. Novenson, 'The Jewish Messiahs, the Pauline Christ, and the Gentile Question', *JBL* 128 (2009) 357-74.

conventional resonances of the word.<sup>79</sup> Nor is this an idiosyncrasy of Pauline style. Rather, as recent research has made clear, this is how ancient Jewish texts that mention 'messiahs' typically clarify what they mean by that multivalent scriptural word.<sup>80</sup> This, I suggest, is the kind of reading one would have to do to get at what Paul means when he refers to Jesus as *χριστός*. In any case, it is clear that the messiahship of Jesus in Paul cannot be read directly off the grammar of Paul's sentences. Fifty years after Dahl's essay, it remains a problem for exegesis.

79 Hays, 'Christ Prays the Psalms'.

80 On this point see P. Schäfer, 'Diversity and Interaction: Messiahs in Early Judaism', *Toward the Millennium: Messianic Expectations from the Bible to Waco* (ed. Peter Schäfer and Mark Cohen; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 15–35; L. T. Stuckenbruck, 'Messianic Ideas in the Apocalyptic and Related Literature of Early Judaism', *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments* (ed. Evans and Porter) 90–113.